

Advice to the Du'aat

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In the Name of Allâh, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

Question: As salaam 'alaikum, Jazaak Allaah Khair for the detail answers to my previous question, however I would like you to clarify further some issues. You stated, in your previous answer, that you thought of the du'at in the west as being "Uncle Toms". With reference to this statement how would you openly address the issues of the ummah (with hikmah) as I think many of the du'at do not speak out due to imprisonment... in other words what should they do?

Response by Brother Tariq: I disagree that it's simply a matter of fear for Uncle Tom. If someone is afraid, they'll stay quiet, OK. But when we see Uncle Tom go beyond silence, when we see him go out of his way to water down Islam – in coordination with its enemies, at that – this tells us that a problem exists which runs far deeper than fear. As you know, there have been many ideological attacks on Islam over the centuries, and with each one, you find that the scholars responded to it in one three ways:

- Some were so bedazzled by the civilization from which the attack came that it colonized their hearts & minds completely, causing them to rethink Islam through the enemy's eyes, using the enemy's terminology.
- Some tried to find a halfway point, where they would compromise on some matters but not on others (i.e. the 'balancing act' approach).
- Finally, there were the scholars who made the choice to stand their ground and refuse any compromise in the face of the pressure of the times.

So, Uncle Tom's problem is not fear. Rather, he has allowed the ideological attack to overrun him and colonize his heart & mind, all so that he can be accepted by the status quo. Don't think that Uncle Tom sits at home in anguish, wishing that he could speak out against his oppressor. No – he is so mentally enslaved by his oppressor that he no longer even considers him an oppressor! (For a better idea of this mentality, look up a condition called 'Stockholm Syndrome') So, your question of 'What should they do' is somewhat misplaced, as it naively assumes that they want to do something in the first place! They have long ago chosen the path of surrender, psychologically speaking. Therefore, the more practical question for you to ask, and for us to explore, is: for those of us who want to protect the Ummah, resembling that third group of scholars mentioned above, what should we keep in mind to avoid resembling the first two groups? Specifically, how do we do this living in the West, where this odd, alien version of Islam is practiced that is stripped of any 'izzah?

There are specific verses in the Qur'an which, upon reflection, provide some tips. In particular, you should focus on the story of Moses & Pharaoh. It's the most oft-mentioned story in the Qur'an, the most detailed, and the most similar to the story we are living today: a nation of believers (the Children of Israel) oppressed by a tyrannical government (that of Pharaoh), and a Muslim leader (Moses) tasked with defending them, teaching them, and teaching their oppressor about Islam. So, how did Moses – a Prophet of God, an expert da'i – approach the issues of the Ummah in such a climate?

The first thing to note is that Moses had a clear concept of wala' & bara'. Looking at the relationship between Pharaoh and himself, there is no ambiguity as to where his loyalties were, no confusion as to which side he was on, no blurring of the lines between the two sides. Moses considered Pharaoh and his allies to be clear, manifest enemies. Reassuring the Children of Israel in their hardships, Moses said to them:

{*"It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemy..."*}
(al-A'raf, v.129)

This attitude of Moses is further confirmed by this aggressive supplication he made against Pharaoh:

{*"Our Lord! You have given Pharaoh and his officials luxury and wealth in this life to mislead people from Your path. Our Lord, destroy their wealth, and harden their hearts so that they will not believe until they see the painful torment!"*}

(Yunus, v.88)

And describing Moses, God said:

“Then the family of Pharaoh picked him up, that he might become an enemy and a cause of grief for them...”

(al-Qasas, v.8)

The attitude and emotions that Moses harboured for Pharaoh are important because Moses understood that if he did not have a clear idea of who his enemy was, it would be impossible for him to devise the necessary strategy to protect himself and his people from the many plots of that enemy. This is why we are given a heads-up in the Qur'an about Satan:

“Indeed, Satan is an enemy to you. So, deal with him as an enemy.” (Fatir, v.6)

An enemy will not announce his plans to you. He will be subtle, deceptive, smiling, patient, cunning, and exploit you before you know what hit you. This occurs not just in the physical sense, but on the psycho-mental plane as well – in other words, your heart & mind. One of the classic strategies of psychological warfare is for an enemy to convince you that he is in fact on your side, looking out for your interests, in order to use you against your true friends (i.e. his enemy). By falling for this trap, you've already lost any chance of protecting yourself or your people. Furthermore, a lack of clear loyalty towards your brothers & sisters is a trait of the hypocrites, condemned by God:

“They are swaying between this and that, belonging neither to these nor to those...”

(an-Nisa', v.143)

Therefore, the first step in defending and protecting the Ummah, whether in speech or writing or any other form, is to revive the concept of wala' & bara' in your mind in order to avoid blurring the line between friend & enemy. This is crucial, and is simply reflective of the world we live in.

The second thing to watch out for is the ubiquitous use of terms like 'radicalism,' 'extremism,' 'terrorism,' and other '-ism's. These are nothing more than tools of deception used to confuse the world. When fighting Moses, Pharaoh used the same strategy of claiming to fight extremism:

“Pharaoh's officials said: “Will you leave Moses and his people to spread mischief on Earth...?””

(al-A'raf, v.127)

“Leave me to kill Moses, as I fear that he will change your way of life or bring about destruction on Earth!”

(Ghafir, v.26)

And Pharaoh set himself up as the one preaching moderation and civility:

“Pharaoh said: “I only show you what I see as correct, and I only push you towards the path of guidance.””

(Ghafir, v.29)

But in reality, Pharaoh used these terms in reference to the message of Moses, because he was against what Moses stood for. The Egyptians who converted to the religion of Moses even confirmed this when they said to him:

“All that you hold against us is that we believed in the verses of our Lord when they came to us!”

(al-A'raf, v.126)

It's important that we stop for a second and think about this verse, because it shows that, unlike many today, the believers saw right through Pharaoh's false deception of Moses as some bloodthirsty wacko following a set of crazy beliefs. They knew that Pharaoh was not fighting radicalism, extremism, or terrorism, but used these terms to dissuade the masses from following what Moses stood for. Why? Because what Moses stood for was that we should submit only to God, not tyrants, and this message would give any who follow it a new found sense of dignity, pride, and self-respect after having spent so long with their hearts & minds colonized by Pharaoh. The Stockholm Syndrome would be no more. This is why we today see concepts that have the same liberating effect demonized and referred to with such ugly, negative labels (wala' & bara' becomes “radicalism,” defensive Jihad becomes “terrorism” or “militant Islam,” Shari'ah becomes “extremism,” and so on), and you unfortunately see the masses buying into this without thinking, to the point that some du'at will even adopt these terms when speaking and writing! This is exactly what that first group of scholars I mentioned at the start did when reacting to the ideological attack: they allowed themselves to be colonized. These 'counter-radicalism conferences' that Uncle Tom proudly participates in: Can you imagine Moses reaching out to Pharaoh and offering to “de-radicalize” the Children of Israel? Our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them both) inviting Special Agent Abu Jahl to Dar al-Arqam to lecture the Sahabah on “the need to counteract extremism”? Of course not. So, like the followers of Moses, you should stay hip to the ancient strategy behind the use of these deceptive terms, and refrain from using them altogether.

Another point to think about is applying wisdom and gentleness. You mentioned the word hikmah in your question, and what you'll find is that people go to extremes both in neglecting it and trying to apply it. Some neglect it by not tempering their style according to their audience. Others go to the opposite extreme by thinking that hikmah entails censoring the actual content of their message, and if you look at how Moses applied these concepts, you'll find that he did no such things. Like us, Moses was in the minority. Like us, he was in a position of physical weakness. Like us, he faced overwhelming circumstances. And like us, he was specifically commanded by God to apply gentleness when addressing the issues of the Ummah:

{*"Go to Pharaoh, as he has transgressed and speak to him gently..."*}
(Ta Ha, v.43-44)

But when you look at other verses, you see that while Moses was wise in his da'wah, he did not interpret this to be a green light to censor truth:

{*"It is incumbent on me to not speak about God but the truth!"*}
(al-A'raf, v.105)

Furthermore, it did not imply being timid in the face of injustice:

{*"Turn the Children of Israel over to us, and don't torment them! We've come to you with a sign from your Lord, and peace will be upon those who follow the guidance. Indeed, it has been revealed to us that the torment will be upon those who deny & turn away from the truth."*}
(Ta Ha, v.47-48)

Let's stop for a minute and look at this last series of verses. Here, we have Moses – weak, oppressed, in the minority, commanded with gentleness while facing the leader of the world's greatest superpower of the time – doing three things in his speech regarding the plight of his people:

- He laid out clearly Pharaoh's crimes against his people.
- He demanded firmly that Pharaoh put an end to his crimes.
- He warned Pharaoh of divine consequences for his tyranny.

You see that Moses was not apologetic, was not defeatist, was not vague, was not timid. He did not let his physical weakness get in the way of his moral strength. Rather, he said what needed to be said, in the way it needed to be said, when it needed to be said, and this is in fact exactly how Ibn al-Qayyim defined hikmah: "*Hikmah is to say what needs to be said, in the way it needs to be said, when it needs to be said.*" ('Madarij as-Salikin', 2/479) Moses spoke with dignity and boldness, and most importantly, he got his message across loud and clear. We know this based on Pharaoh's reaction – he didn't invite Moses to more counter-radicalism conferences or solicit his "expertise." Rather, Pharaoh tried to kill Moses, just as civil rights and resistance leaders throughout history have been targets for assassination by those whose crimes they'd exposed. And the pattern continues to this very day...

Most of us are timid. We want to avoid tension and conflict at any cost, and be liked by all. Even if we think that a bold move is right to make, we don't carry it out because we are terrified by the consequences, of what others will think of us, and of the attention we will get if we dare to go out of our place. We may disguise our timidity as wisdom, but it is in fact selfishness and nothing else. Timidity is an acquired habit, not a natural one, picked up out of a desire to avoid tension. Root it out of your life, and replace it with boldness. The consequences of timidity are far worse than those of boldness, (not least of which is that you lower your own sense of self-esteem). Sufyan ath-Thawri would actually urinate blood out of the intense frustration he felt with himself when he failed to say what needed to be said in enjoining the good and preventing evil. So, when given the opportunity to make yourself heard, do not hide behind convenient ambiguity, which will get you nowhere. Imitate Moses, and name names – mention the US government, and Palestine, and Iraq, and Afghanistan, and sister Aafia, and so on – so that our oppressors know exactly how we feel about their actions. This is not extremism or radicalism. This is called fulfilling your obligation by telling it like it is.

And hikmah does not entail that we hide entire portions of our religion simply because they happen to be taboo in society. The whole point of being a da'i is to expose the truth, not hide it:

{*"And when God took a covenant from those who were given the Book: You are to expose the truth, not hide it..."*}
(Al'Imran, v.187)

{*"Those who hide the explanations and guidance that We have revealed after We have exposed it to the people in the Book – they are cursed by God and those who curse."*}
(al-Baqarah, v.159)

And the Prophet issued a stern warning to those who see no problem in staying quiet when asked for the answers they know: "**Whoever is asked about a piece of knowledge and hides it will be branded with a brand of fire on the Day of Resurrection.**" This applies even when it comes to the taboo, controversial topics in our religion. For example, take the topic of Jihad. Rather than take the "*my hands*

are tied and my tongue is silent" approach (New York Times, 3/17/11), why not just explain what the true Islamic concept of it is? You're not being asked to brandish a sword down the street. Just explain to those who want to know: what do the four mainstream, orthodox, classical schools of jurisprudence say? If you live in the so-called 'Land of Freedom' but don't feel free to assert that Islam teaches self-defence against an attacker, then perhaps you should start thinking about hijrah to a place where you don't fear being thrown in prison for supporting such a basic human concept. There is nothing in our religion – not one letter of the Qur'an or Hadith – that we should be embarrassed or ashamed or afraid to explain to people. After all, was the American Revolutionary War anything other than a jihad against British occupier, and the French Resistance anything but a jihad against the Nazis? So, what's the difference?

Finally, we come to the issue of persecution (although as I previously stated, Uncle Tom's problem goes beyond fear), which is the common coat hanger excuse used to justify everything imaginable. But Moses and the Children of Israel also faced a climate of fear – one that was far worse than ours! Moses and Aaron complained:

{ "Our Lord! We fear that Pharaoh will transgress or act oppressively against us!" }
(Ta Ha, v.45)

{ "But none believed in Moses except a few of his people's offspring, due to fear of Pharaoh & his officials that he would persecute them." }
(Yunus, v.83)

{ "And Moses felt fear in himself." }
(Ta Ha, v.67)

They feared imprisonment:

{ "Pharaoh said: "If you choose a god besides me, I will surely imprison you!" }
(ash-Shu'ara', v.29)

They feared torture:

{ "Pharaoh said: "I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, and I will crucify you on the trunks of date palms." }
(Ta Ha, v.71)

They feared death:

{ "Indeed, Pharaoh became powerful on Earth, and divided its people, oppressing a group of them by killing their sons and keeping their women..." }
(al-Qasas, v.4)

History repeats itself. There is not one thing that the FBI or MI5 is doing to us today that was not done to the believers in the past, and we even have it easier than they did. But despite that fearful climate, and the very real threat of terrible persecution at the hands of Pharaoh, we've seen that Moses broke the spectre of intimidation. Moses is different from the Uncle Toms of today in that he made a choice to suppress his fear, rely on the aid of God, and do his job. As a result, the sea was parted for him. All he did was make a choice, folks. Others who made the same choice had the sea of darkness parted for them, too. In 'Siyar A'lam al-Nubala' (10/257), it's mentioned that Imam Ahmad was in prison in Baghdad for refusing to sell out on the Din, and was visited by al-Marwadhi, who tried to convince him to save himself. So, Imam Ahmad instructed him to go outside the prison to such-and-such a location, and return to relay what he saw. Once he got to where he was instructed, al-Marwadhi saw a sea of people sitting with pen & paper in hand. He asked them what they were doing, and they replied: "We're waiting to see what Ahmad bin Hambal will say so that we may write it down." al-Marwadhi returned and relayed what he saw, to which Imam Ahmad peered out at him from his cell and said: "And you want me to mislead all of these people?" And after three years in prison, he was released.

A true scholar – a true believer, actually – values the truth over his personal safety. When the Prophet was trapped with Abu Bakr in the cave, do you remember what he said to him? He didn't say 'Don't be afraid,' he said: **"Don't be sad,"** because Abu Bakr did not fear for himself. Rather, he was saddened at the prospect of the message dying off if they were killed by the pagans. Abu Bakr knew that the threat to his personal comfort was inseparable from true da'wah to Islam. There is just no way around it: anyone who sincerely wants to deliver the uncut, unedited message of the Prophets and wants an enjoyable, easy ride is in the wrong business. You must be mentally tough and willing to venture out of your comfort zone at times, come what may. Do not let fear hold you back from anything.

Hopefully, by thinking hard about the aforementioned verses and applying the lessons they contain when speaking & writing, we can begin to raise our chins off of our chests.



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